
INSTITUTIONAL DISTINCTIVES

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

The distinctives that cause a church to excel at its work are, at least in part, a part of its mandate from the Lord. All humans share common characteristics that differentiate them from antelopes, yet they also have qualities and traits that make distinctions among their own kind. In the same way, churches share enough similarities with one another to make them unlike grocery stores, but churches do not all look alike.

The features of one church do not necessarily resemble those of another church, anymore than one person's personality or face looks like another. A sovereign God has made each of us who and what we are by His grace—and that 'grace work' extends to congregations as well as to people. It will help us in our leadership to know ourselves as unique congregations.

WHO ARE WE; WHAT ARE WE LIKE AS A CHURCH?

It is a difficult concept to grasp, but it is made easier by first asking the questions:

- What is our primary business?
- What are we really trying to do as a church; what is our end purpose?
- What produces real gain for the kingdom of God and for our church? How do we measure true profitability as a congregation?

Of course, at The Coastlands our mission is to love, mend, train and send people, but the way we do that is by multiplying and discipling disciples. Not only do we want to nurture and develop believers; we also want to inspire those we disciple to disciple others. We are trying to mobilize people that mobilize people—raise up leaders who will raise up others.

So we must ask ourselves: what are the primary means by which discipling disciples are raised up? The answer to this question will be our three or four performance drivers. By identifying and, on a system-wide basis, directing resources toward what makes us most productive, we will make significant gains in accomplishing our goal.

SOME COASTLANDS DISTINCTIVES

What are the keys to our uniqueness as a church? What do the Europeans see? What makes us stand out from other American churches?

The Key Staff Planners at The Coastlands came up with these replies:

1. A Pentecostal church with seeker sensitivity.
2. A process church, not a production/performance oriented church; a group of senders and releasers, not collectors.
3. A living body that depends on everyone being involved and working together; every part is counted on to serve people, not the church.
4. A congregation, not just a weekly collection of people or a crowd; a transparent offer of relationship and connection with other people.
5. A place where every servant is equally valued; and where anyone is encouraged to be themselves.
6. A loving community where you don't have to appear together or be a Christian of certain stature; it's OK to fall apart and admit it.
7. A setting for one-on-one discipleship in the context of meaningful and honest relationships.
8. A part of a worldwide denomination, belonging to something bigger than ourselves.

CORE VALUES

What are our core values, and how do they give rise to our distinctives? What makes our slant on ministry different from others? What do we emphasize that not all other churches or emphasize?

What are the distinctive experiences that people coming to our church will have? Our preliminary answers were:

1. Being believed in and accepted.
2. Being loved and healed where people are at, yet having high hopes for their future.

3. Being nurtured and trained to touch others.
4. Being well-known, loved and ministered to personally because the level of involvement of people in church is more important than the size of the church.
5. Being challenged and led; being included and needed as a fellow servant.
6. People being more than just a project; being valued for who they are, not what they can do.
7. Developing a worldview, not just a local view.
8. Giving ourselves away; exporting, sharing with others, pioneering, rather than attempting to preserve or collect for ourselves.
9. Experiencing discipleship, mentoring, training, teaching and not doing things alone.
10. Help people reach their fullest ministry potential and function in it.
11. Living in merciful and mutual accountability with vulnerability and a willingness to be wrong, recognizing that failure does not disqualify; refusal to repent does.

QUESTIONS TO PROVOKE THOUGHT

1. What will make us stronger or better as a church that disciples disciplers?
2. How can we enhance our way of doing church?
3. What changes people from being receivers into being givers?
4. What can we do to attract more people to the ICUs?
5. What would most help our ICU leaders to do a better job?
6. What do Apprentice Leaders need in order to do their jobs better?
7. How can we identify and develop future Apprentice Leaders sooner?
8. What would most help Cluster leaders do their job better?

GOALS FOR CLUSTER LEADERS, ICU LEADERS AND APPRENTICES

1. Really “own the vision” of multiplying disciple-developers.
2. Be highly motivated to recruit new members, and to nurture existing members of the ICUs.
3. Lead with the correct mentalities—transferring to others what has been given to them; readying the group for multiplication; etc.
4. Live in the freedom of being loved and trusted to do what works best for others in pursuing our dream for people... Not every ICU and Cluster is supposed to do things the same way. Differences in personality and life-situation and ministry gift-mixes make differences in how leaders carry out their role as leaders.
5. Recognize the benefits of being connected to others—caring for and being cared for... “Span of care” is not a structure to be obeyed; it is a reality that can free people.